

tion, Zola now relapsed into the position he had occupied before "L'Assommoir."

But he had made a fresh effort as a playwright, having prepared a dramatic version of "Pot-Bouille," in conjunction with M. Busnach. This, which was produced at the Arnbigu Theatre on December 13, 1883, proved less successful than its forerunners, "L'Assommoir" and "Nana," and Zola, in a grumpish mood, decided to remain at "the mill," that is, write another novel. This time, however, he hesitated awhile as to his subject. Among those he had selected for consideration was the railway world, but he was still at a loss how he might work it into a novel. It would be better to turn to the peasantry, to whom he must certainly devote a book; and so, after telling Goncourt that his next novel would be called "La Terre," and that in order to obtain the requisite local colour he would have to spend at least a month on a farm in La Beauce, he asked his friend if it would be possible to procure him a letter of recommendation from some large landowner to one of his farmers, who might be willing to give a lodging to a lady in poor health and in need of country air. The lady in question — Madame Zola — would naturally be accompanied by her husband, and, added Zola, a double-bedded room with whitewashed walls would be ample

accommodation, though it must be arranged that he and his wife should take their meals with the farmer and his family, for otherwise he would learn virtually nothing.¹

He realised, apparently, that folks unbutton themselves

really published. Some copies were on Japan, India, and Dutch, paper.

Forty-fourth thousand in 1893 on completion of the Rougon-Macquart series ;

fifty-fourth thousand in 1903.

¹ " Journal des Goncourt," Vol. YI, p. 288 (January 16, 1884).